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ABSTRACT

Electronic databases have become important resources for researchers in many disciplines. While there is no single database designed to cover the field of communications, there are several databases which include material that is of interest to investigators in the field. An experiment was performed to determine which databases would be most useful to communications scholars. Topics representing the dominant paradigms of the discipline were searched on the 11 databases selected as most likely to provide strong coverage of the communications literature. Among the topics chosen were: audience behavior, communications theory, media content, the relationship between mass media and the state, and the economics of the communications industry. Information on those topics and the results obtained are compared. The most useful databases are described in terms of the types of communications research being reported in the literature. Lists of the most important databases for communications research and online vendors are included. Recommendations that reflect the diverse methodologies and research interests of those in the field have been provided. (THC)

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Databases for Communications Research

by Ralph Alberico and Maxine Snow

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Databases For Communications Research

Electronic databases have become important resources for researchers in many disciplines. While there is no single database designed to cover communications there are several databases which include material that is of interest to investigators in the field. An experiment was done to determine which databases would be most useful to communications scholars. Topics representing the dominant paradigms of the discipline were selected. Among the topics chosen were those relating to audience behavior, communications theory, media content, the relationship between mass media and the state, and the economics of the communications industry. Several databases were searched for information on those topics and the results obtained were compared. The most useful databases are described in terms of the types of communications research being reported in the literature. A survey of the most important databases for communications research is included. Recommendations that reflect the diverse methodologies and research interests of those in the field have been provided.

INTRODUCTION

The field of scholarship known as mass communications is both the subject and the object of this article. While it deals with mass communication research and its literature, this article is also concerned with one of the newest forms of mass communication -- online information retrieval. Throughout history there have been many formats for recording the written word. The machine-readable database represents a qualitatively different way of storing and interacting with the written word. At this stage of the game it doesn't seem as if the phosphorescent word will replace the printed word. More and more we are seeing a symbiotic relationship developing between the two. Anyone who has used a word processor can testify that it outpaces the typewriter when it comes to cranking out printed words. Even such bastions of the printed word as the newspaper editorial office have been quick to adopt computerization on a large scale. The widespread development and use of electronic databases promises to have profound effects on academic research and publishing.

A database is a collection of information organized in such a way that specified pieces of information can be easily retrieved. The "pieces" of information that together form a database are called records. The records in a database could be newspaper articles, statistical tables, bibliographic citations or any of a number of other information units. Records can be easily added to and removed from computerized databases. Databases are dynamic -- they change. When a computer is used to

query a database millions of records can be rapidly scanned. Those meeting specifications provided by the person in front of the terminal can be selected and printed or displayed.

Many online databases began as printed indexes to the literature of specialized subject fields. Computer technology originally developed to store and photo-typeset printed works was adapted for automated information retrieval. Among the earliest databases were electronic indexes to scientific and technical literature developed by government agencies such as NASA and the National Library of Medicine. Now there are thousands produced by a variety of government and private organizations. Learned societies and professional organizations have also been very active in the production of databases. Databases now serve as important gateways to the accumulated discoveries of many disciplines. Each acts as an electronic memory of the research knowledge of its discipline -- a dynamic memory that can be queried in sophisticated ways.

Database producers abound but the system vendors from which electronic information is available are relatively few in number. (see Table 1) System vendors are the distribution channel through which machine-readable information is marketed. Databases are purchased from their producers by companies that resell the electronic information contained in them to researchers. Those companies maintain powerful computers and the software that enables customers to query numerous machine-readable files. Interaction with databases is accomplished with remote terminals or microcomputers that have been adapted for telecommunication.

Pricing formulas vary but most incorporate a database royalty or connect-time fee, telecommunications costs, and a charge per unit of information received. Online searching has long been the province of libraries. Lately there has been a major marketing effort by system vendors directed toward individual researchers. Searches that were once conducted by intermediaries are now being conducted by individuals who own microcomputers.

The majority of subject oriented databases contain textual information. Most are bibliographic. Rather than containing the complete text of journal articles, they contain bibliographic references. Databases began as files comprised of representations of documents. There is now a trend toward larger records. Abstracts which can be a few pages long but which are generally a paragraph or two are often added to bibliographic citations. As computer memory has become cheaper and more plentiful the number of full text databases has increased. Entire journals, newspapers, and reference works can now be searched and delivered electronically. The researcher is no longer limited to viewing representations of documents. System vendors like NEXIS and VU/TEXT specialize in full text databases.

The qualitative difference between an electronic database and a printed reference work lies in the speed, capacity and flexibility of the computer. The sheer volume of information that can be included as well as the speed with which desired pieces of information can be located are important differences. An equally important difference is the ability of the person using a database to combine ideas and create conceptual sets of

references relating to topics of interest. The researcher can focus on only those aspects of a topic which are pertinent to his or her interests. For example, one could retrieve references to studies on the censorship of newspapers during the Vietnam war by combining the keywords NEWSPAPERS, CENSORSHIP, and VIETNAM.

Bibliographic and full text databases are supplemented by numeric and directory files. Data included in those specialized files can be manipulated to suit the needs of researchers. For example, a corporate directory database could be used to generate a list of newspaper publishers ranked in order by market share. Statistical files include demographic, economic, and other social science data.

DATABASES FOR COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH

The availability of databases serving a specific field of scholarship is determined by a variety of factors. Scientific, technical, and business databases predominate because people have been willing to pay for the information they contain. Government involvement has also led to the development of databases for many fields. ERIC, the excellent education database would probably not have been produced if its production had been linked to market forces rather than government involvement. Professional organizations are also responsible for the creation of a wide variety of databases. Publishers of traditional printed sources have also become involved in database development and many databases evolved from printed series.

Unfortunately coverage of the literature of communications as a discipline is not electronically available from a single

source. Nevertheless the literature of communications is well covered in a variety of electronic sources. In fact, it is sometimes easier to use commercially available databases for communications research than it is to use them in disciplines that are served by their own databases. Databases representing an array of other disciplines may be used quite effectively for mass communications research. (see Table 2)

THE EVOLVING LITERATURE OF COMMUNICATIONS

A variety of factors are responsible for this phenomenon. Among those factors are the evolving nature of communications as a discipline, the historical development of university Communications programs, and research methodologies shared with other disciplines. Common concerns of researchers in all of the social sciences have also tended to result in a dispersion of communications research articles among the scholarly journals of several disciplines.

The literature of communications is replete with articles examining the nature of the discipline and its relationship with other fields of study. Though its core journals cover the key areas of concern, topics of vital interest to communications scholars are often reported in the literature of other disciplines. University programs in Communications are departmentalized in ways that reflect their origins in journalism education. Weaver and Gray (17) trace the history of journalism education from its roots among the liberal arts to its development as an empirical social science. Historical, rhetorical, and biographical studies yielded to quantitative, experimental analysis. The

present day literature of communications reflects the many perspectives that have been taken over the years. American colleges and universities offer majors in areas as broad ranging as Journalism, Public Relations, Advertising, Broadcasting and Film. The diversity of communications scholarship defies easy categorization. The diverse perspectives of communications scholars and the typical approaches to the subject matter also make it difficult to describe the research literature in monolithic terms. Any analysis of the literature of mass communications must refer to the subfields of communications as well as to other disciplines that investigate topics of concern to communications scholars. Historians, sociologists, psychologists, political scientists, economists and journalists have all played a role in the development of communications as a discipline. We will look at the literature and the databases with those formative roles in mind. We are not concerned with the technological literature of communications although our study does accomodate historical, economic, or political perspectives on technology. Our discussion of other disciplines is intended to provide a framework within which to discuss the databases that may be used for communications research. Before discussing the databases let us review the printed sources on communications research and look at the core journals of communication. One objective point of comparison between databases is their coverage of core communications journals.

THE CORE LITERATURE OF COMMUNICATIONS

A database's character is determined at the most fundamental level by the titles it indexes. Any database which is going to be useful to a person conducting research in mass communications must provide access to the central literature of the field. What constitutes communications core? A number of researchers have attempted to circumscribe the literature of communications and have discovered a discipline that is uncommonly scattered. The discipline's roots in sociology, psychology, political science, speech and literature are apparent in its theory, methodology, and the journals which serve the field. Cross-disciplinary information exchange can give strength and breadth to any field. Yet the degree of scatter demands that investigators in communications maintain an awareness of a formidable body of literature. This is precisely why computerized databases are such effective tools for the study of communications.

Two interrelated audiences have an interest in communications periodicals. Journalists and many of those who educate students to enter the mass communications industry comprise one audience. They require technical literature and business news. A second group, which overlaps with the first, are theorists and scholars, interested in communications as a social phenomena rather that as a technique. In every issue of JQ there is an eclectic and useful current bibliography of articles on mass communications. This series, "Articles on Mass Communications in U.S. and Foreign Journals," reflects the dichotomy in the field. Time, TV Guide and Newsweek appear regularly in the bibliography

alongside the more scholarly **Public Opinion Quarterly**, **JQ**, and **Communications Research**.

In addition to the bibliography which appears in JQ, there are several regularly appearing bibliographies and indexes which provide access to the literature of mass communications. Dunn and Cooper have written an excellent guide to these and other sources for communications researchers. (6) Every year **Gazette: International Journal for Mass Communication Studies** publishes a bibliography which primarily contains citations to articles in English and German language professional journals. Its subject coverage is broad and while it contains references to many empirical studies it reflects the European emphasis on the theory and politics of communications. **Communications Abstracts** has been published quarterly by Sage Publications since 1978. Abstracts of books, reports, and periodical articles are included. Every five years, the Speech Communications Association, publisher of the **Quarterly Journal of Speech**, issues the **Index to Journals in Communications Studies Through** [year]. The next edition is planned to appear in 1986 or 1987.

There are a few indexes which cover narrower subfields of communications. **Journalism Abstracts** , published since 1963 covers dissertations only. **Public Relations Review** issues an annual **Public Relations Bibliography**. Since 1973 there have been two indexes to the literature of film studies, International **Index to Film Periodicals** and the smaller **Film Literature Index**.

These print indexes and abstracts were specifically developed to meet the needs of researchers in mass communications. None of these bibliogarphies have equivalent online databases.

One of the ways we sought to identify databases which fill this gap was by testing their coverage of core communications journals. For the purpose of this investigation it was necessary to develop a list of core journals concerned with communications as an academic discipline. Table 3 provides a possible list of core communications periodicals. This list was compiled by comparing the bibliometric studies of Tankard et al (16), and those of Reeves and Borgman (14) and the survey of journalism educators conducted by Smith and Larkin (15). JQ, **Public Opinion Quarterly**, **Journal of Communication**, **Journal of Broadcasting**, and **Communications Research** appeared on the lists drawn up by each of these investigators. **Columbia Journalism Review** and **Broadcasting** were on two of the lists. The inclusion of these core journals can serve as a rough measure of a database's coverage of communications. This list is proposed however, with the awareness that the literature of communications auxillary disciplines -- sociology, psychology, and political science -- is also essential to communications research. The cross-disciplinary nature of communications has been decreasing as the field matures. The establishment of new journals is partly responsible for this shift. **Communications Research**, **Human Communication Research**, and **Journalism History** are only ten years old.

Using a core list of journals to measure a database's coverage also ignores the value of books. Tankard et al (16) studied the most cited references in JQ from 1978-1980. Ten of the eleven most cited references were books. In assessing a database's strength then, indexing of core journals is only one important factor among several requirements.

AN EXPERIMENT

An experiment was done to determine how a variety of commercially available databases cover communications research. Among the things we were seeking to discover was the extent of coverage of core communications journals provided by each database. We selected eleven databases which were the most likely to provide strong coverage of the communications literature. These were **ABI/INFORM, America:History and Life, ERIC, Historical Abstracts, Language and Language Behavior Abstracts, Magazine Index, Management Contents, MLA Bibliography, PAIS International, PSYCINFO,** and **Sociological Abstracts.** A search was conducted to see how many times each one cited the journals on our core list. The investigation provided a few suprises. The most unfortunate discovery was that none of the databases in our test covered **Columbia Journalism Review.** The sole exception was **ABI/INFORM** which indexed it from January 1975 to April 1975. There is no consistent coverage of the **Columbia Journalism Review,** an important journal to the field of communications.

ERIC, PsycINFO, and **Sociological Abstracts** provided the highest number of citations to the core literature. Age, size and indexing policy are the factors which combined to make **ERIC, PsycINFO,** and **Sociological Abstracts** the most successful in covering the core journals. Yet there are other criteria by which to judge a database. Our initial forays into the eleven databases demonstrated that there is no single indispensible file that covers all of the literature. We were also interested in determining which databases could be used to identify communications literature reflecting some of the different paradigms

adopted by writers in the field. One of our goals was to identify the most useful databases for scholars working in specific sub-fields of communications. Other important considerations were cost, ease of use, and special features that would be of use to communications researchers.

The databases we searched are available from most of the large system vendors. As we describe our experiment and its results we will be commenting on specific databases as they relate to representative areas of communications scholarship. Detailed information on the databases we describe can be found at the end of this article.

One of the areas in which we were interested is the relationship between the literature of communications and the literature of the other social sciences. For our experiment we constructed a group of research topics reflecting the broad range of communications scholarship. Each topic was intended to represent a particular aspect of the literature. The treatments we were interested in ranged from theoretical to aesthetic, to empirical. Since we were interested in comparing the performance of a variety of databases, computer searches of different files were done for each topic.

AUDIENCE RESEARCH

The literature concerning the effects of television on children could easily fill a small building. That topic more than any other reflects the dominant paradigms of communications scholarship. It is a challenging, multi-dimensional and profoundly important issue. It has been the subject of scores of

studies many of which were government supported. Different facets of the topic have been examined within a large and diverse group of disciplines. The literature on the subject is not constrained by academic boundaries. Our experiment focused on the research on children and television and violence.

No other problem in the social sciences has been the subject of such intense concern and sustained research effort. Without a doubt this is the Manhattan Project of the social sciences. The Surgeon General's report alone resulted in five thick volumes of studies on the subject. Our search on this topic was designed to achieve a high degree of precision and retrieve only the most relevant documents. Nevertheless the 6 databases we searched yielded 60 pages of references covering a time period of approximately 20 years.

Our search revealed the lack of any concensus among the many researchers who have studied this issue. It is one area of communications inquiry that is still the subject of intense debate. Children's television is not without vocal opponents who cite numerous studies that demonstrate its negative influence on behavior as well as attitude. Children's programming has also had its defenders who stress its utility as an educational tool which could make learning more fun than ever before. A number of researchers formed conclusions which placed them in a middle ground between television's champions and those who condemned it. They found that the parent's reaction to what was occuring on the screen was as important as the program's content. Literature reflecting every conceivable approach to the topic was easily

identified in our computer search.

The ERIC database with 110 references was the winner of the recall sweepstakes. This is not surprising; an education database like ERIC would be expected to provide good coverage of topics relating to children. ERIC included the broadest spectrum of sources and, as an added bonus, cited the greatest number of core journals. The ERIC database is divided into two sections. One section (CIJE) is limited to journal sources and the other (RIE) includes a miscellany of publication types. Our ERIC search cited 32 journal articles -- 9 of which appeared in core journals. The other segment of the ERIC database, the RIE section, included the most heterogenous assortment of publications we saw in any of our searches. Reports of all types; books, reviews, and studies sponsored by groups as diverse as ABC, the Rand Corporation, and the Committee on Children's Television were all there. Government publications were well represented; we even saw abstracts of Canadian Senate Hearings. One nice thing about the documents cited in the RIE section of the ERIC database is the fact that most of them are easily available on microfiche as part of the ERIC document collection at libraries throughout the country.

The majority of sources on this topic abstracted by ERIC can be described as reports on empirical, behavioral research. The second largest group of references fall under the heading of position papers. This is indicative of the strong political component of much communications scholarship. Content analysis has become a widely used tool in communications research. We were surprised at the sparsity of content analyses on this topic

cited in any of the databases we examined. It is worth noting that our search of the ERIC database in addition to listing research reports, position papers, and a few content analyses, also cited a number of literature reviews and comprehensive annotated bibliographies.

The only other database that came close to ERIC on this topic was PsycINFO which is produced by the American Psychological Association. Besides picking up a few core journals that were not cited elsewhere PsycINFO identified 26 dissertations on the topic. Behavioral research studies predominated, accounting for 38 of 54 journal references. There was a certain degree of overlap between ERIC and PsycINFO but the latter database included a large number of laboratory experiments that weren't picked up by ERIC making it an especially good choice for those interested in the experimental analysis of behavior.

We searched several other databases for information on this topic. While none of them approached ERIC or PsycINFO, all of them listed sources that weren't cited elsewhere. It seems as if no one will ever have the last word on this topic. Even PAIS, the poorest performer with only a single citation, yielded a unique reference to a 356 page report from the Social Science Research Council.

COMMUNICATIONS THEORY

In order to see which databases were most effective for locating purely theoretical literature we searched for articles about the theories of the Frankfurt School. During the sixties many radicals sought to work outside of the structures of estab-

lished leftist parties. They required Marxist theories which were applicable to the United States, the most advanced capitalist nation. Many were drawn to the Frankfurt School because it analyzed the subtle forms of domination which exist in an apparently free society.

This school of thought, which had its roots in the Weimar Republic at the Institut fur Sozialforschang at the University of Frankfurt, became influential among American sociologists. They, and some psychologists, economists, historians and philosopheres studied mass media as an agent of control.

We conducted a search for material relating Frankfurt School theories to mass media. Not suprisingly, Sociological Abstracts was the most successful database. Among the 22 citations it identified was one which applied critical theory to the "Mickey Mouse Club Show" (13). Every one of the 22 citations was relevant. The abstracts presented by Sociological Abstracts were often rousing, losing none of the proselytistic character of the documents they summarized. One, borrowing language from its source, accused the French philosopher Althusser of reducing theory "to the status of the handmaiden of political action" (10).

Descriptors are subject words used to describe documents. These too were sometimes chosen from the vocabularies of sociological jargon and activist lingo. An article about the ideology of the American dream was indexed under "struggle, struggles", adopting the language of revolutionary polemics. The most troublesome aspect of Sociological Abstracts is its use of de-

scriptors. Its policy guarantees redundancy. If any form of a word is used, all forms are used. "Communication, Communications, Communicative, Communicating, Communicator, Communicational" filled the descriptor field of many of the records. The same concept was conveyed in six ways where other more meaningful terms could have been added. At best this policy is inefficient. At worst it is imprecise, losing the subtle differences between words such as "value" and "values".

MASS MEDIA AND THE STATE

Censorship, by definition a denial of freedom, is always received suspiciously. Most journalists subscribe to the ideal of an independent press and believe that neutral journalism can and should exist. The press is undoubtedly powerful but many journalists maintain that its power stems naturally from its presentation of the objective truth. Critics, pointing to the televised coverage of the Vietnam War, view the press as a force that is highly independent of and hostile to the government. And some of these observers feel that the press needs to be regulated.

The debate over government's right and need to censor the press during times of war intensified when journalists were denied acces to Grenada during the United States invasion in 1983. Articles were written which attempted to distinguish between the need to contain military secrets and censorship used to manipulate public opinion. This is a topic of great concern to working journalists and to the academic community. From the press and general public there have been many editorials and position

papers written. Historical journals are filled with studies of wartime censorship. In the journals of communications and its related fields there have been quite a few newspaper content analysis studies which sought to investigate the degree of consent or control during times of crisis. We were interested in determining which databases would perform best on questions of public policy. The databases which seemed most likely to yield successful citations were America:History and Life, ERIC, Historical Abstracts, Magazine Index, National Newspaper Index, and PAIS. If success is measured by quantity of relevant information retrieved, Magazine Index and National Newspaper Index clearly outdistanced the other databases. Magazine Index located 61 articles of which 55 were obviously related to the topic. National Newspaper Index found 53 articles. All but one were of use. These bibliographies were comprised of news items and editorials, signed and unsigned, all written for a general audience. Neither Magazine Index nor National Newspaper Index provides abstracts of the articles cited, leaving the researcher somewhat in the dark. Headlines of newspaper articles are usually plain enough to convey some sense of the article. Magazine article titles may not be. National Newspaper Index goes one step towards summarizing the article by adding, in parentheses, embellishments to titles. Its notes such as (Grenada-invasion media censorship pro-con) or (Los Angeles Times poll) are very useful.

ERIC, a database whose stated focus is education actually extends to cover a much wider array of fields. When we searched ERIC for material on censorship or freedom of the press during wartime, we located a small but varied and serious body of liter-

ature. The nine documents it cited included four articles from **Journalism Quarterly**, one from **Journalism Educator**, three conference papers and one diatribe aimed at tendentious leftist journalists. For strictly historical articles the obvious choice would be either **America: History and Life** for articles on American history or **Historical Abstracts** for articles on world history. Both databases have a policy of including articles about journalism and communications if they are written from a historical perspective. Articles that are primarily theoretical are avoided by their indexers.

America: History and Life uncovered nine relevant and varied articles. Significantly, three of these had appeared in **Journalism Quarterly**. Issues of censorship in the Civil War, both World Wars, the Spanish-American War, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War were examined. **Historical Abstracts** cited 12 articles which chronicled press censorship in Hungarian, French, and German. Depending on the researcher's language abilities the international character of this database can be viewed as a strength or a weakness.

MEDIA CONTENT

Crime, especially violent crime, seems to play well in the local news media. Whether this is because crime stories are used by manipulative journalists to sell newspapers and attract viewers or because the media are responding to a deeply rooted need for tales of passion, desperation and violence is a question which will probably never be resolved. For whatever reason

crime stories do seem to attract large audiences and much of crime reporting seems to portray crime in a vicarious way. The latest twist in local crime reporting is the "crimestoppers" TV spot. Typically, an especially heinous or gruesome unsolved crime is dramatized on the evening news. Paid actors play the role of victim and criminal. Members of the viewing audience are invited to play the role of detective and help solve the crime. A large cash reward is usually offered as a prize in this latest of electronic contests.

Our search focused on local crime reporting but we wanted to pay special attention to the dramatization of crime on local television news. We wanted to see if anyone was studying this issue, what kind of perspectives were being taken, and, which databases are most useful for identifying the type of studies being done.

None of the databases we searched provided substantial amounts of information on local crime reporting. Sociological Abstracts was the most productive with three references. One of those references was to a content analysis that appeared in the Journal of Communication (7). Newspapers and television newscasts were analyzed for crime coverage. The other two references were to "field experiments" which were reported in a psychology journal and a criminology journal. One of them, entitled "Nearly 2,000 Witnesses Can be Wrong" (4), describes an experiment in which a simulated mugging was broadcast on a local TV station. An identification lineup was aired after the broadcast of the simulated crime and the telephone responses of "witnesses" were analyzed. Perhaps the most significant discovery related to this

search was the fact that the study cited in the communications journal was a content analysis as opposed to the experimental approach used in the studies reported in the other social science journals. Research focusing on audiences and audience behavior seems to be more prevalent in related social sciences than it is in communications. Articles in core communications journals seem more likely to deal with content analysis of communications media than to deal with audience behavior. We noticed this trend in several of our experimental computer searches. It may be indicative of a divergence between the approaches employed by communications scholars from the methodology used by other social scientists.

None of the other social science databases performed as well as **Sociological Abstracts**. However, both **Magazine Index** and **National Newspaper Index** provided general background information on the topic from the popular press. **Magazine Index** cited articles which appeared in **Psychology Today** and **Newsweek** while the **National Newspaper Index** referred to a long and well-researched piece that appeared in the **New York Times**.

AESTHETIC CRITICISM

Communications scholarship is not without an aesthetic dimension. Mass entertainment and art forms have received a good deal of attention in the communications literature. The medium of a mass entertainment or art form seems to bear a relationship to the focus of that attention. Film study and criticism are deeply rooted in communications' foundation as a literary, rheto-

rical field of study. Television on the other hand is generally examined in empirical terms. Even its artistic content is analyzed quantitatively.

The Vietnam war is now widely regarded as the first television war (2). The relationship between that war and the medium of television has long been and continues to be a matter of intense concern. After a hiatus of a few years studies of Vietnam and the movies are also beginning to emerge. While World War II is undoubtedly the subject of more movies than any other war the Vietnamese conflict has also frequently been replayed on the big screen. Vietnam war films run the gamut from art to propoganda. Escapist, exploitative potboilers share the rubric with thoroughly researched documentaries and self-consciously artistic efforts. Our search on Vietnam War movies revealed a relatively small but growing body of literature. Most of the articles cited date from the 80's. We suspect that most of the studies on television and Vietnam are contemporaneous with the war itself and were done during the 60's and 70's. Film as a less immediate mode of communication has dealt with the war in a quite different way than has television. The articles examining Vietnam war movies reflect the differences between film criticism and television criticism.

The majority of studies we were able to identify appeared in popular journals of opinion or specialized journals of film criticism. The focus seemed to be more analogous to literary analysis than to television research. We didn't see a single empirical study or content analysis. The tone of most studies was aesthetic or polemical. There was a clear contrast

between these results and the results associated with the other topics we researched. Databases covering the social sciences did not perform as well here as they did on the other topics we chose. Strong social science databases like **PsycINFO**, **ERIC** and **Sociological Abstracts** failed to produce a single useful reference. **Magazine Index** yielded the greatest number of pertinent references and covered a surprising number of scholarly film journals in addition to the journals of opinion in which articles on this topic often appear. **MLA Bibliography**, a database of literary and linguistic studies, cited a number of film journals most of which were not also cited in **Magazine Index**. The **National Newspaper Index** database while not as useful as **Magazine Index** or **MLA** did list critical analyses that appeared in influential newspapers like the **New York Times** and the **Christian Science Monitor**. Film programs at universities are as likely to be associated with English departments as with Communications departments. Film study is certainly not among the research emphases of the social sciences. Both the source literature of film criticism and the databases that identify that literature are indicative of the difference between film research and the other major subfields of communications research.

THE COMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

On an elemental level mass communications is an industry. It's a business whose powerful incorporeal product is entertainment, information and possibly truth. Each year these commodities become more expensive to produce. Independent newspapers have been threatened by this trend and in many cases have disappeared

or have been swallowed up by larger corporations. Changes in the ownership of newspapers have the potential to restrict or enhance the flow of information and to alter the very way we perceive the world. And so while the structure of media's management is primarily a question of business administration it is also of concern to social scientists, theoreticians in the humanities and to the general public. To see which databases would be most efficacious for locating business related information we looked for information on the ownership of newspapers.

National Newspaper Index identified the greatest number of citations. This database is comprised entirely of articles from newspapers. It was no suprise that the ownership of the press was a subject very dear to newspapers. These articles were predominantly brief items which described ownership changes within particular newspapers.

There are two databases which aim to cover the literature of management. One is **ABI/Inform**, the other **Management Contents**. ABI/Inform performed very well in this instance. It located 37 relevant articles, each well summarized in an abstract . The sources included business journals, law journals, popular magazines,and some of the journals which we have considered core communications titles. **Management Contents** was not as successful. It found five articles. These included an evaluation of the **London Times** since it was taken over by Rupert Murdoch, and two investigations into the effect of decreased competition on advertising rates. One of those studies discovered that rates rose the other, that rates decreased. While **Management Contents** found a

much smaller number of articles it must be noted that they were all relevant and none were duplicated by **ABI/Inform**. For comprehensive results, it would be wisest to search both databases.

A third database to consider is **Economic Literature Index**. This file covers 200 English language economic journals providing access to the theoretical literature of economics. It would be the database of choice for anyone who wished to avoid any popular, applied or legal articles. It lacks the helpful abstracts which are provided by both **ABI/Inform** and **Management Contents**.

PAIS International cited a variety of sources which included American and foreign communications journals, a monograph, newspapers, law journals, and business journals. The major difficulty encountered when using **PAIS** is its application of subject descriptors. In most cases a paltry number of descriptors are used and these are so broad that they hinder precise searching. An article on the moral content and ownership structure of Paris newspapers was indexed under "Newspapers -- France". Another which analyzed the relationship between circulation and competition was indexed under "Newspapers--United States". In using this database, a searcher can only gain precision by looking for words in titles or in the occasional abstracts.

ADVERTISING RESEARCH

Much of the content of our mass communications media is comprised of advertising. Advertising is therefore a major focal point for communications research. Advertising is generally analyzed in economic, psychological, or political terms. There is also a significant body of literature relating to the techni-

cal and business concerns of the advertising trade.

Our computer searches on advertising dealt with a relatively new development known as "lifestyle advertising" or psychographics. Such advertising focuses on consumers in terms of their lifestyles and personal values rather than in more traditional demographic terms. There has apparently been a considerable amount of research relating to the impact of "lifestyle" advertising on consumers. However it seems that much of that research was sponsored by advertising firms and is proprietary in nature. Therefore we were able to identify many sources that discussed psychographic research but we were unable to identify a significant number of actual research reports.

The **ABI/Inform** database was the clear winner on this topic with 70 references as well as the longest and most informative abstracts. The vast majority of those references were to the literature of advertising. The trade (e.g. **Advertising Age**) and the academic (**Journal of Advertising Research**) literature were equally represented. Coverage of core communications journals was limited. There was one notable exception. The **Columbia Journalism Review** published an article entitled "Boob Rubes" that criticized the romanticization of rural lifestyles in advertising (8). Here is a quote from the **ABI/Inform** abstract,

> The evocation of this slow paced, regional America on prime time TV is awesome in its irony. The ad community is engaged in appealing to a big city audience by evoking for them a way of life whose current adherents are considered undesirable. They are selling products which have contributed mightily to the collapse of that way of life. And they are using a medium which, more than any other force, put the last coffin nails in the rustic life.

Management Contents, **ABI/Inform's** major competitor among bibliographic business databases was disappointing both in the number of sources it listed and in the brevity of the abstracts it provided. **PsycINFO** performed well, displaying a strong research orientation. However the research cited was more likely to relate to topics like the effect of television commercials on black children than it was to deal with the relationship between psychographics and consumer behavior. **Magazine Index** produced a few false hits by indexing special advertising sections within magazines along with a few pertinent references. **PAIS** yielded a reference work listing "ethnic, cultural, religious, and lifestyle media & markets in the U.S." Though many of our searches produced ambiguous results this one led us to a single conclusion. **ABI/Inform** is the obvious first choice for those wishing to examine the research literature of advertising.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Any attempt to identify the database which best serves the field of mass communications must inevitably return to a definition of communications research. The field includes a variety of subdisciplines and methodologies. Of all the databases available, ERIC has the broadest utility, providing strong coverage of core journals, a mix of experimental, research, literature reviews, bibliographies, and position papers. Sources include journals, government documents, reports and books.

For reports of experimental research it would also be advisable to search in the more expensive **PsycINFO** database or in **Sociological Abstracts**. For purely theoretical articles Sociolo-

gical **Abstracts** is the prime choice. It can be expected that citations identified through either of these databases will be partially duplicated by **ERIC**.

There are two databases which cover the literature of business administration. Of these we found that **ABI/Inform** was more likely to provide a higher number of citations. For comprehensive coverage it is necessary to search through **Management Contents** as well.

The field of Film Studies is best covered by the journals and festshriften contained in the **MLA Bibiography** and by the popular press indexed by **Magazine Index** and **National Newspaper Index**. Unfortunately, the most recent citations in **MLA** are over a year old. H.W. Wilson company, publishers of the familiar **Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature**, as well as **Humanities Index**, **Business Index**, **Social Sciences Index** and others, has recently made its indexes available online. These databases are new and do not presently contain much retrospective material. In time as they grow, they should become very effective for mass communications research including Film Studies.

ADDITIONAL DATABASES

The latest counts (20) tell us there are now over 2800 commercially available databases. The files thusfar treated in this article represent a tiny percentage of the total available databases. Many of the specialized databases that are currently accessible hold the promise of potential rewards for communications scholars who are engaged in specialized research. For example, **Medline**, the excellent medical database would be inval-

uable to someone conducting research in the growing field of health communication. **INSPEC**, a comprehensive file of the world's physics, electronics, and computer science literature, is an excellent source for information on technological developments and includes a surprising number of references related to telecommunications policy. A database like **U.S. Political Science Abstracts** would certainly be vital to any investigation of the role of mass media in the American political process. Citation indexes like **Social SciSearch** and **SciSearch** make it possible to study scientific and scholarly communication in ways that were previously not possible by enabling the researcher to observe the intricate web of connections among scholars. **Information Science Abstracts** covers the theory and technology of the information systems which may very well become a major form of mass communication in the future.

NONBIBLIOGRAPHIC DATABASES

The rapid growth in the number of full text, numeric, and directory databases is a trend that is bound to have a significant impact on mass communications research. The full text of over 20 local newspapers as well as wire services make it possible for users of the **VU/TEXT** system to conduct content analyses and comparative studies of news coverage without having to travel from place to place or scan endless reels of microfilm. It's significant to note that **VU/TEXT** is owned by Knight Ridder, one of the largest newspaper conglomerates. International news databases such as **DataSolve World Reporter** and **InterLink Press**

Service provide world wide coverage of news media. It is now possible to easily study news media in the Third World and to analyze the transborder flow of information -- an area of growing concern among communications scholars.

Numeric and directory databases also hold great potential as analytical tools. Our search of the Trinet Company Database generated a chart ranking the top broadcasters, newspapers, magazine publishers and book publishers. The chart was produced according to our specifications and in addition to ranking the top communications companies, compared the volume of each company's business within the communications industry to its total sales. Directory databases like the Electronic Yellow Pages are capable of generating lists representing an incredible number of permutations. The same database can be used to create a list of all the public relations firms in Texas or all the movie theaters in New England. It is even possible to produce mailing labels sorted in a variety of ways. Demographic databases of all types offer social scientists unique research opportunities and are also being used extensively by those in the communications industry. A demographic database like Donnelly Demographics can be used to generate custom-designed reports of all types.

DATABASE ECONOMICS

The cost of producing and distributing printed material has been steadily rising while the cost of electronically stored and distributed information has steadily declined. As promised advances in memory technology are realized this trend can be

expected to accelerate. Nevertheless using online databases as research tools can be an expensive proposition. Unlike printed reference works which are purchased only once and may be used as frequently as desired, electronic information is paid for as it is being used and each time it is used. It is difficult to determine in advance exactly how much a computerized literature search will cost. To further complicate matters there are substantial price differences between databases and retrieval systems. A variety of formulas for determining the cost of an online search are being used by different systems and databases. Some emphasize connect time. Others are shifting to unit-of-information charges as the largest cost component. Still others charge for the amount of computer processing required to fetch the desired piece(s) of information. The online industry is still young and its environment is rapidly changing. Pricing formulas have changed considerably during recent years. Developments such as the widespread availability of full text databases (almost all of which include copyrighted material) will keep the ways in which electronic information is bought and sold in a state of flux.

COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH AND THE USE OF DATABASES

The online industry is relatively small when compared to other communications industries but it is growing rapidly. The use of retrieval systems by those ultimate information consumers known in the industry as end users has important implications for communications scholars. Studying the ways in which people interact with vast stores of electronically recorded information

is an intriguing new area of communications research. Scholars working with this nascent medium will be presented with the opportunity to further extend the boundaries of the discipline of Communications.

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TABLE 1

LIST OF SYSTEM VENDORS

BRS (Bibliographic Retrieval Service)
1200 Route 7
Latham, NY 12110
(518) 783-1161 (800) 553-5566
("Supermarket" vendor)

Datasolve Ltd.
Grosvenor House
4-7 Station Road
Sunbury on Thames
Middlesex TW16 6SB
Tel Sunbury (09327) 85566
(Full text news database)

DIALOG Information Services Inc.
3460 Hillview Avenue
Palo Alto, CA 94304
(415) 858-2700 (800) 227-1927
(Largest "Supermarket" vendor)

Interlink Press Service
777 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017
(212) 599-0867
(Full text news database; emphasis on Third World)

Mead Data Central (NEXIS)
P.O. Box 933
Dayton, OH 45401
(513) 859-1611 (800) 227-4908
(Full text news (NEXIS) and legal (LEXIS))

NewsNet Inc.
945 Haverford Road
Bryn Mawr, PA 19010
(215) 527-8030 (800) 345-1301
(Full text trade newsletters)

SDC Information Services
2500 Colorado Avenue
Santa Monica, CA 90406
(213) 453-6194 (800) 421-7229
("Supermarket" vendor)

VU/TEXT Information Services
1211 Chestnut St.
Philadelphia, PA 19101
(215) 665-3300 (800) 258-8080
(Full text newspapers)

Wilsonline
H.W. Wilson Co.
950 University Avenue
Bronx, NY 10452
(212) 588-8400 (800) 622-4002
(Periodical indexes)

TABLE 2

USEFUL DATABASES FOR COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH

DATABASE	COVERAGE	DOCUMENT TYPES	COST	ABSTRACTS	PRINT EQUIVALENT
ABI/INFORM. Data Courier,Inc. Louisville,KY	Business Management & Administration 8/71-present; weekly updates.	Articles from approx. 550 journals. 80% English language	MODERATE (50-100/HR.)	YES	NONE
AMERICA:HISTORY & LIFE. ABC-CLIO,Inc. Santa Barbara,CA	American & Canadian history & related topics in the social sciences & humanites limited coverage of current events or theory. 1964 - present; updated 3X yearly.	Articles & book reviews from approx. 2,000 U.S. & foreign journals. Also contains books & dissertations.	MODERATE (50-100/HR.)	YES	AMERICA: HISTORY & LIFE
ERIC. Natl. Inst. of Education. Wash.,D.C. & ERIC Processing & Reference Facility. Bethesda, MD	Though ERIC's point of departure is education,it provides broad coverage of the social sciences. 1966 - present; monthly updates.	ERIC is comprised of RIE, a collection of reports,books,theses, government documents, & CIJE, an index to more than 700 periodicals.	INEXPENSIVE (25-50/HR.)	YES	RIE & CIJE

HISTORICAL ABSTRACTS. **ABC-CLIO,Inc.** **Santa Barbara,CA**	World history from 1450 to the present excluding the U.S. & Canada. 1973 - present; quarterly updates.	Articles from more than 2,000 English & foreign language journals as well as an occasional festschriften, conference proceeding or collection. Dissertations are also included.	MODERATE (50-100/HR.)	YES	HISTORICAL ABSTRACTS
LANGUAGE & LANGUAGE BEHAVIOR ABSTRACTS. **Sociological Abstracts, Inc.** **San Diego, CA**	Verbal and nonverbal interpersonal communication. 1973 - present; quarterly updates.	Articles from approximately 1,000 English & foreign language journals.	MODERATE (50-100/HR.)	YES	LANGUAGE & LANGUAGE BEHAVIOR ABSTRACTS
MAGAZINE INDEX. Information Access Corp. Belmont, CA	Current events,opinion, book, film & product reviews. 1959 - March 1970; 1973 - present; updated monthly.	Articles from more than 435 popular English language magazines.	MODERATE (50-100/HR.) FULL TEXT OF ARTICLES, $7.00	YES	MAGAZINE INDEX
MAGAZINE INDEX ASAP. Information Access Corp. Belmont, CA	Current events,opinion, book, film, & product reviews. 1983 - present; monthly updates.	Full text of articles from over 60 magazines.	MODERATE (50-100/HR.) FULL TEXT OF ARTICLES, $7.00	YES	NONE

MANAGEMENT CONTENTS. **Management Contents, Inc.** **Northbrook, IL**	Management. Sept. 1974 - present; monthly updates.	Articles from over 700 U.S. & International journals, books,transactions, courses,newsletters, tabloids & research reports.	MODERATE (50-100/HR.)	YES	**BUSINESS PUBLICATIONS INDEX & ABSTRACTS**
MLA BIBLIOGRAPHY **Modern Language Association of America.** **New York, NY**	Literature,linguistics & film studies. 1970 - previous year, annual updates.	English & foreign language articles from journals & collections & books.	MODERATE (50-100/HR.)	NO	**MLA BIBLIOGARPHY**
National Newspaper Index. **Information Access Corp.** **Belmont, CA**	Everything that appears in newspapers except weather charts, stock market tables, puzzles and horoscopes. 1979 - present; (L.A. Times & Wash. Post, 1982 - present); monthly updates.	Articles from the N.Y. Times, Christian Science Monitor, Wall St. Journal, L.A. Times, and Washington Post.	MODERATE (50-100/HR.)	NO	**NATIONAL NEWSPAPER INDEX**
NEWSEARCH. **Information Access Corp.** **Belmont, CA**	Current events. Current month only; file size varies; updated daily.	Articles from newspapers, popular magazines,trade & legal journals.	EXPENSIVE (100-150/HR.)	NO	NO
NTIS. **National Technical Information Service.** **U.S. Dept. of Commerce.** **Springfield, VA**	Science and social science research. 1964 - present; biweekly updates.	Reports of government sponsored research.	INEXPENSIVE (25-50/HR.)	YES	**GOVT.REPORTS ANNOUNCEMENTS & INDEX**

PAIS International. **Public Affairs Information Service, Inc.** **New York, NY**	Public policy. English language: 1976 - present; Foreign: 1972 - present; quarterly updates.	Articles from English & foreign language journals. Books, pamphlets, government publications.	MODERATE (50-100/HR.)	YES	**PAIS BULLETIN & PAIS FOREIGN LANGUAGE INDEX**
PSYCINFO. **American Psychological Association.** **Wash., D.C.**	Psychology & behavioral research. 1967 - present; monthly updates.	Journal articles, technical reports, monograph series, & dissertations.	MODERATE (50-100/HR.)	YES	**PSYCHOLOGICAL ABSTRACTS**
SOCIAL SCISEARCH **Institute for Scientific Information.** **Philadelphia, PA**	Social & behavioral sciences. 1972 - present; monthly updates.	This is a citation index to articles & books. Every records lists all cited references.	EXPENSIVE (100-150/HR.)	NO	**SOCIAL SCIENCE CITATION INDEX**
SOCIOLOGICAL ABSTRACTS. **Sociological Abstracts, Inc.** **San Diego, CA**	Sociology & related social & behavioral disciplines. 1963 - present; updated 3X yearly.	Periodical articles, books, conference proceedings & reports.	MODERATE (50-100/HR.)	Yes	**SOCIOLOGICAL ABSTRACTS**

TABLE 3

COVERAGE OF CORE COMMUNICATIONS JOURNALS

Databases which provide consistent coverage of core journals

JOURNALS	DATABASES
BROADCASTING	ABI/Inform
COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW	
COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH	PsycINFO
JOURNAL OF BROADCASTING	ERIC; Sociological Abstracts
JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION	ERIC; PsycINFO
JOURNALISM QUARTERLY	America: History & Life; ERIC
PUBLIC OPINION QUARTERLY	America: History & Life; Magazine Index; PsycINFO; Sociological Abstracts